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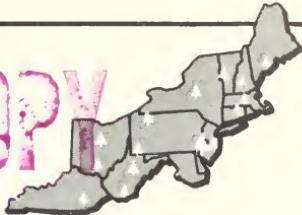
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PERMIT COMPLIANCE IN EASTERN WILDERNESS: PRELIMINARY RESULTS

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Abstract.—Sixty-eight percent of the visitors to a wilderness area in the White Mountain National Forest obtained the required travel permits during the summer of 1975. These data appear to follow patterns found in other such studies.

INTRODUCTION

Commencing in June 1975, visitors to the Great Gulf Wilderness and the Dry River Wilderness of the White Mountain National Forest in New Hampshire and Maine were required to obtain and carry with them wilderness travel permits.

The need to institute permit systems such as this arises from the now familiar problems of managing wilderness areas under increasing public use. It is important to the backcountry recreation manager to know how many people are using the areas under his control, in order to manage appropriately the maintenance of and access to these areas.

Self-registration systems have been of some assistance in the estimation of actual wilderness use, but the percent of people registering at unmanned trail registers has been found to be as low as 28 percent (*Lucas 1975*). As Hendee and Lucas (*1973*) point out: "Although the self-registration systems employed on the national forests provide the best data available on

wilderness visitation, many of the estimates of use do not meet even... very lenient standards." Hence, the trend has been to introduce mandatory permit systems for wilderness travel.

As might be expected, some backcountry recreationists ignore even the mandatory registration. In order for backcountry managers to estimate *actual* usage of backcountry areas, it is necessary to know the proportion of users complying with the permit system.

THE STUDY

A study was carried out in the summer of 1975 to determine what proportion of backcountry trail users had the required permits. This was the first year of mandatory permits in the

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White Mountain National Forest wilderness areas and, since no fines were imposed on those who did not get their permits before entering the wilderness areas, we did not expect the 90 percent compliance ratios cited by Hendee and Lucas (1973) and Lime and Lorence (1974).

The study was carried out in the Dry River Wilderness Region of the White Mountain National Forest. Permits for the use of this area are readily available at several locations.

Throughout the summer of 1975, a trail patrolman (called a ridgerunner) spent a total of 63 days walking the three major trails of the Dry River Wilderness. He spent 56 percent of his time on the Dry River Trail, 29 percent on the Rocky Branch Trail and 16 percent on Davis Path. The first two of these trails are on low-lying, wet terrain; the Davis Path is higher and drier.

In general, the reaction of the parties to the ridgerunner was favorable. They seemed glad that someone was "caring" for the wilderness.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the data on compliance gathered by the ridgerunner on each of the three major Dry River Wilderness trails.

Approximately 68 ± 3 percent of all the people using the Dry River Wilderness in the summer of 1975 obtained the required wilderness permits. The ridgerunner stopped and interviewed every group he met along the trail. If a party did not have a permit, one was issued on the trail, and the group was instructed

on the proper procedure for getting one in the future and on the potential fine for non-compliance.

Length of Stay

Table 2 shows the expected length of stay of the 48 groups found without permits in the wilderness during July. Of these parties, 83 percent were planning to camp for at least one night. This finding is especially troublesome, because an attempt is being made to regulate overnight use much more carefully than day use because of its potential impact on the area.

Table 2.—Intended length of stay of parties found without permits in the Dry River Wilderness during July 1975.

Length of stay	Percentage
Daytime only	17
1 night	35
2 nights	29
3 nights	15
4 nights	2
5 nights	0
6 nights	2
More than 6 nights	0

Conclusions

Additional studies should be made to determine whether there are any noncompliance patterns among the trail users. The Dry River

Table 1.—Compliance with permit requirements in the Dry River Wilderness, June through October 1975

Item	Trail			Total
	Davis Path	Dry River	Rocky Branch	
Number of people in parties with permits	65	477	163	705
Number of people in all parties	119	655	267	1,041
Percentage with permits	55	73	61	68
Confidence limits at $p < .05$	46-54	70-76	55-67	65-71

Wilderness and the Great Gulf Wilderness areas are rather different with respect to a number of variables (popularity, distance from White Mountain National Forest campgrounds, etc.). There is no reason to believe that their compliance ratios are the same. In future summers, we plan to gather data in the Great Gulf Wilderness.

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